

Trade Missions

Make Foreign Markets Easily Accessible

By Mark Crawford

Expanding into new markets is a top goal of any business. But if you are uncertain about the wobbly economy, your cash flow, or have a conservative management approach, you're probably reluctant to try a foreign market. As appealing as they may be, foreign markets are complicated—expensive travel, difficulty understanding the language or culture, developing leads, and dealing with a whole new batch of laws and regulations. But trade missions are a great way to quickly navigate these concerns and penetrate a new foreign market.

Ray Tierney, principal with environmental engineering firm **BT2, Inc.** in Madison, recently returned from a trade mission to Sri Lanka that focused on improving water quality in that country. "It was successful in many facets," says Tierney. "I made personal connections in Sri Lanka, a beautiful, welcoming country. It's a place that has a very great need for the services that BT2 and other U.S. firms provide. And the trip established access routes for BT2 to learn about business opportunities in the country."

How Trade Missions Work

The Wisconsin Department of Commerce (DOC) sponsored trade missions to Japan and China in 2004 and Mexico in



Ray Tierney
BT2, Inc.

March 2005. Mexico is now Wisconsin's second-largest export market—exports grew 35% in 2004 to \$1.06 billion.

"Our trade missions are geared toward small to mid-sized companies that want to initiate or expand exporting efforts," says **Tony Hozeny**, director of communications for the DOC. "Smaller companies typically don't have VPs of international sales. Our consultants visit their offices, look at their products, and help them develop an export plan—all of which are free services."

Governor Jim Doyle has personally led Wisconsin's recent trade missions. "Having the DOC and the governor involved gives the companies on the trade mission extra credibility," indicates **Steve Hughes**,

Hughes, who went on the mission to Mexico. Hughes is COO for **Lyco Manufacturing** in Columbus, which manufactures commercial-grade equipment for the food-processing industry.

"The DOC plays a very important role in generating international trade for companies," adds Tierney. "It's unlikely that BT2 would have been able to schedule a trip that was as productive in terms of meetings and networking as the DOC was able to do. The background information we were provided in briefing alone would have taken us a month or more to collect."



Steve Hughes
Lyco Manufacturing

Wisconsin Trade Missions

For its trade missions, the Department of Commerce (DOC) arranges appointments with qualified business contacts and senior government officials in the foreign country who can open doors to influential decision makers and give participants valuable first-hand market research.

To learn more, visit www.commerce.state.wi.us and click on "International Trade." Or contact DOC trade-mission coordinators Christine Stamm (264-7824, cstamm@commerce.state.wi.us) and Jennifer Winner (266-0413, jwinner@commerce.state.wi.us).

Seeing Results

Building relationships always takes time, especially in a foreign country. But the DOC jump-starts the process by setting companies up with pre-screened government and private-sector representatives who are interested in their products.

"During our trip we interviewed numerous candidates to rep us and have already signed agreements with reps in Mexico, who came to Wisconsin for training last month," says Hughes.

Dennis Johnson, president of **CECOR, Inc.** in Verona, was also on the Mexico trade mission. "I went looking to set up a distribution network to sell our industrial vacuum systems," says Johnson. "I didn't really know what to expect, but was very pleasantly surprised. There's a real need for our equipment in Mexico. The reps seemed excited about our product. We're still educating the reps, but I have sent out one quote already."



Dennis Johnson
CECOR, Inc.

A Learning Experience

If you're contemplating exporting to a foreign country, but aren't sure how to go about it, sign on for a trade mission. "The DOC does a first-class job and almost holds your hand through the whole process," says Johnson. "It was much easier than I thought it was going to be."

"Take advantage of trade missions," Hughes agrees. "It's important to learn from others about the culture of doing business in foreign countries. You also learn a lot about what has and has not worked in foreign markets."

"Going to Sri Lanka was a wonderful chance to immerse myself in another culture," says Tierney. "I was able to evaluate their real-world needs, suggest solutions, and also to learn—far more than I taught." ■